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Dease River
Tsetsaut
Frances Lake

fish spear tines. After being softened by boiling caribou horn could be shaped into spoons with the aid of a stone knife. Several implements utilized teeth. A skin scraper consisted of four beaver teeth set in a wooden handle and secured with babiche line, while a beaver- or porcupine-tooth awl permitted drilling in wood. Men mounted two beaver teeth in a wooden frame for use as a drawknife or chisel. 321 412

The processing of animal skins constituted one of a woman's major tasks. After a preliminary smoking the worker rubbed the skin with a mixture of caribou brain and animal grease. She left the hide to soften for three days and then washed it in water. Afterwards it was kneaded with the fingers and scraped on a frame with a scraping stick that carried a stone blade. Following another soaking in the brain mixture the process was repeated one or more times before smoking. Use of urine in tanning was not admitted. 281

Animal hides at various stages of processing, along with various vegetable products, provided materials for cordage. Types of line included sinew, rawhide, semi-tanned hide, smoked (tanned) skin, spruce root, twisted grass, and willow root. Although in a somewhat different category, the witches made by twisting side-duck feathers may also be mentioned here. Fish-skin line and spruce-root cordage are explicitly denied by contemporary informants. Strong rawhide came from beardale and, like caribou rawhide, served for packing. Caribou and beaver (?) pelts provided babiche, while in an emergency strong packing line that remained useful for relatively limited periods could be fabricated from willow bark.[1] Grass-woven baskets had been heard about by a Dease River informant. They were manufactured in summer by women as receptacles for storing food and other materials. Grass mats met with no recognition. 283 [287] [288]

Tsetsaut. The entirely Kaska prepared a needle with an eye from a marten bone. Although not certain of the kind of bone used, the informant would not assent to the suggestion that it might have been a pelvic bone. 321 412

Frances Lake Kaska. A traveler's mention of "caper" of goat's hair among the Frances Lake Indians is evidence of the processing of goat's wool and its probable use in weaving.[2] 286

FOOD—ITS COLLECTION, PREPARATION, AND EATING

Upper Liard Kaska. The aboriginal Kaska community took many of its cues from the seasons, whose perpetually recurring cycle accompanied notable changes in the habits and conditions of the animals on which the people depended. In late summer, when game had increased, hunters and their families moved into the mountains in pursuit of the goat, sheep, caribou, gopher, and ground hog. People thought of the long, lean season of winter as the season limited thereafter to drying meat and cutting it for future consumption. Meanwhile men readied snowshoes, toboggans, and walking sticks. When the snow became deep and the severe cold began to set in the families gathered together around a fish lake where, a little like some of the other animals, they "hiber- 221

[1] An informant reported that among the Beer Lake Island Sex was not from rawhide, semi-tanned skin, and smoked skin. Demonstration by another informant from this group revealed use of the hamstrings for making two ends of babiche.

[2] Honigmann, *Frances Lake*, Fieldnotes (1944), 78.

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heavier pole was employed. In winter, brush placed under the point where a fall log 224
fastened on the snow prevented this part from sinking. The pen behind the trigger stick
was also provided with spruce boughs. Beaver deadfalls, erected on land behind a beaver
house, were of the platform variety, the platform being secured to the uprown post
with spruce-root line and weighted down with rocks or earth—in winter only rocks.
Ground-hog deadfalls also followed the platform pattern, the 14-inch uprown post
consisting of a bent alder limb or crooked spruce root. Nets of semi-tanned skin line [386]
spread under the ice also helped to catch beavers. After the net had been set the trapper
broke down the animals' house, causing the inhabitants to flee toward the net. The
trapped beaver were dispatched after the net was raised. The suggestion that pitfalls
may have been used along the Upper Liard comes only from their mention in folktales.*

For hunting the Indian armed himself with the bow, arrows, spear, gaff hook, sling, 411
or club. Black-birch wood provided the favorite material for bows and, as in toboggan 422
construction, the wood that grew nearest the outside of the tree was thought to be best
suited for bending. A small amount of (inner?) bark was often left on the bow wood in
order to increase its resiliency. The size of a bow varied; a boy's reached from the ground
to just above the stomach, while a man's extended to his forehead. Fitted to such large
bows by means of a backing that passed through two holes drilled in the stock, was a
guard about the size of a violin bridge. It prevented the bowstring from snapping back
against the fingers. A backing of tanned skin line sometimes appeared on each side of
the guard. Occasionally bows were decorated with a "peppermint stick" design applied [531]
by soaking the stick with widely spaced strips of spruce bark and then drying the wood
over a fire. When dry the bark was pulled free, leaving an attractive black and white
striped effect. Double-strand, twisted, cold-weather dried babiche supplied the bow- [583]
string. The informant objected to employing sinew, claiming that this substance would
be too weak. One end of the line was knotted to an end of the bow stock, while an eye
on the free end slipped over a notch at the stock's opposite end.

A light wood, such as spruce, cooked higher for arrows. A stick cut to suitable size
was heated and then straightened by being worked back and forth in a forked stick
split a short distance below the fork. A nock cut on the rear of the shaft fitted against
the bowstring. The size of an arrow depended in part on its intended function, for game
birds 24 inches was a standard size while 3 feet constituted the size of a shaft suitable
for big game hunting. Points also varied according to function. Detachable points of
bone barbed on only one side** were secured to shafts by means of line. Double bone
points, the barbs facing in opposite directions, served to kill spruce hens and grouse.
Blunt-tipped shafts fitted with a quarter-inch deep notch brought down rabbits and
other small game. Finally, detachable stone points that remained in the animal after
the shaft was withdrawn or broken-off were reserved for big game. To shoot fish a detach-
able flint point was provided and attached to the shaft with two feet of tanned skin
line.

* Pitfalls seem to have been almost among the Fort Nelson Slave. Honigmann, Ethnography and Acculturation of the Fort Nelson Slave (1946), 31.

** Cf., Osgood, Ingalik Material Culture (1940, 80), Illustration 8.

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be pulled the noose tight. Boys sought to catch robins and other small birds with snow-shoe traps. Snowshoes were placed on their sides so that they met at an acute angle. Bait was placed under the trap, from which a line extended to a cover where the young hunter lay in concealment. As a bird entered the structure a boy pulled the line, bringing the snowshoes down on the helpless prey. 223

For hunting caribou, circular enclosures were built that often reached a diameter of 30 feet. Such surrounds consisted of a circle of upright poles with in-between spaces piled with brush. Various points along the fence held snares, each man who cooperated in the building of the pen also setting a few snares. Cooperative effort drove the animals into the surround, where they could be pursued and dispatched with arrows. A wounded caribou could never be clubbed to death nor might he be touched with wood. To violate these injunctions promised a quick end to a hunter's success and might bring retribution in the form of illness. Men sometimes drove caribou into a ravine or against a cliff, where they could easily be speared to death. Sometimes human beings formed caribou "surrounds." 224 [114]

Semicircular tracking, involving a hunter pursuing an animal against the wind, figured in caribou and moose hunting. For this procedure in dry weather, a man removed his moccasins upon encountering a fresh track. Bare feet enabled him to move more quickly, it was said. In autumn caribou and moose were called with birch bark horns or with a moose scapula rubbed briskly against a tree. During the moose calling season a man exercised caution never to take a moose scapula into camp lest a woman set eyes on the bone. Should this happen, he might lose his hunting ability. Before animal traction became prevalent small dogs assisted hunters in running down moose and bear. [184] [131]

Other hunting techniques included breaking into a beaver house in autumn and killing the occupants with spears. The same animals were also taken with nets or with the gaff stick, an implement further employed to hook a porcupine in its den. In summer porcupine could be clubbed to death easily. [141 284]

Kills of large game ended up by being shared between the hunter's and neighboring families who customarily were representatives to pack home the meat. At the scene of a kill each man selected that part of the animal appealing to him. Sometimes, especially when meat was scarce, quarreling might occur over the food's distribution. A story is told of one man who sought to tear a caribou head from the clutch of another. The latter forcibly held on to the tongue until that organ was wrenched from the mouth. A "lazy" man, who did not choose to hunt, freely joined a party going to fetch meat from a kill. Failure to share meat aroused resentment and ridicule. As already indicated, men did the greater part of hunting, boys early accompanying fathers into the bush to learn the necessary techniques. A man who lacked sons might train his oldest daughter to hunt, but her success in such work was believed to depend largely on her chastity.

Although the Upper Liard Kaska, like other northern Indians, regarded game as the most attractive food, actually fish provided the dietary mainstay of the population. From the lakes and stream people took jackfish, lake pickerel, lake and brook trout, whitefish (in smaller numbers because they were kin the prey of jackfish), grayling, burbot, and suckers. Clubbing, spearing, shooting with bow and arrow, netting, and trap- 226

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224 ground and near the animal's trails. Upon completing the structure the hunters ascended the mountain and drove the sheep toward the corral. Human surrounds aided in moose hunting, a circle of men seeking to drive the animal toward a place where snares had been constructed. Great nets, 15 to 20 feet long and constructed of babiche, were planned to catch beaver, a task for summer nights when the beaver swam freely and one that invited family cooperation. Once caught in a net, the animal was clubbed to death. In winter beaver nets were sometimes suspended under the ice. Moose and caribou hunting sometimes involved semicircular tracking and in autumn a hunter called moose with a birch-bark horn or by rubbing a moose wapiti against a tree. Because "moose are smart animals and run away at the smallest sound," tracking them in summer demanded that a hunter remove his moccasins. People did not hunt caribou in bare feet. Often in late winter men depended on deep and crusted snow to help them secure game. The snow impeded the travel of moose and caribou so that the lighter hunter who was also equipped with snowshoes could readily run them down.

411 A man's hunting equipment included the bow, arrows, spear, gaff stick, and club.
224 Birch yielded the commonest bow wood but willow also found employment for boys. The middle of the bowstock was backed with caribou sinew, the object being to insure straight shooting. Twisted sinew or babiche furnished a bowstring. Willow and birch wood furnished material for arrows, while obsidian, flint, bone, and horn provided points. Barbed points appear to have been restricted to the latter two materials. Untipped arrows, the wood of which was sometimes sharpened, were suited for bringing down game birds. Vanes of two or three feathers made use of owl or "any other" kind of feather. Men kept their arrows in tanned skin quivers that were carried under the left shoulder and toward the front of the body. This left the weapons in easy access of the hunter's right hand. Spears, sometimes no more complex than a pointed or unpointed sharpened pole, served to kill bear and beaver. Lance points of bone and caribou horn were also employed. No clear picture could be obtained of the dart thrower or "stick gun," which was frequently mentioned as having been used in the aboriginal community. The weapon apparently consisted of a piece of birchwood fitted with a hole in which was inserted a two-foot dart provided with a stone point. After aiming the dart the hunter smartly rapped the base of the dart with a stick, thereby sending the missile toward its target. Mention of this weapon also occurred in a folktale collected from an Upper Liard informant who, however, denied that the weapon had been used in his territory.* Gaff hooks were inserted into a beaver lodge to seize one of these animals and drew him out to where he could be clubbed to death.

224 Part of every successful hunter's reward came when he proudly returned to camp packing a few token pieces of meat. On the following morning other men went to the scene of the kill and selected whatever portions of the animal they pleased.

[162] In terms of production fish occupied an inferior dietary position compared to meat.
226 Economically they appear to have been of far greater importance. Trout, whitefish, suckers, and jackfish were speared, netted, trapped, and angled. From the elk bones of

* For the tale see Honigmann, *Cultural Dynamics of Sex* (1962), 46, 47, Honigmann, *Culture and Ethos of Kaska Society* (1949), 200.